

U.S. coin redesign predicted

By Roger Boye

Legislation calling for new coin designs will be introduced in Congress this fall, predicts Diane Wolf, a federal fine arts commissioner.

"A bill is being written right now," Wolf said in late August at the American Numismatic Association convention in Atlanta. "I've spoken with several senators and congressmen and they all have been for the idea."

The Commission of Fine Arts—an advisory body appointed by the President—has recommended that Treasury officials and Congress replace designs on the cent through half dollar. Fresh images would generate extra revenue for the government and increase interest in coin collecting, said Wolf, one of seven commission members.

The legislation being drafted probably will propose a change rather than designating specific new designs, Wolf said. Lawmakers might ask the Treasury to establish a special commission that would select themes and then evaluate drawings submitted by artists in a national competition.

"I'd like to see historical events depicted on all coins but I don't think I'll get my druthers," Wolf said. "I think Congress will be fairly conservative; the [new] coin reverses probably will have something to do with the Bicentennial [of the U.S. Constitution]."

Wolf and others contend that U.S. coinage is stagnant because current designs have been in use too long. For example, Abraham Lincoln has adorned the one-cent piece for 78 years and George Washington made his debut on the quarter 55 years ago.

In the 1800s, coin designs changed much more frequently, every 20 years on the average.

"Coins are America's calling cards. Beautiful new designs by American artists will better reflect the spirit and patriotism of America as we enter the 21st century," Wolf said.

Meanwhile, the United States Mint is evaluating the technical aspects of introducing new coin designs.

"That's a major change for us," said Mint Director Donna Pope, who also attended the Atlanta convention. "In the past, the Treasury wouldn't even consider design changes. Now we're studying the issue."

Members of the Oak Forest Coin Club will appraise old coins—free of charge—during the club's annual show next Sunday. Hours are 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Alsip Holiday Inn, 5000 W. 127th St.; look for the coin identification table.